

# The Falcon Focus

Volume 7 – Number 2 – Fall Edition

## ***A MESSAGE FROM THE PTO PRESIDENTS***

Dear Floral Families:

Well the school year is well underway and as we write this letter to all of you, we have the opportunity to reflect on the PTO year so far – it's been a great one!

We couldn't have gotten off to a better start...we had an incredible turnout of people who signed up as volunteers for all the various fund-raisers and events that we do. We can't say it enough how incredibly important this is to make Floral's PTO a successful organization.

We are also very proud to say we have a great group of people who make up our Executive Board, our Sub-Committees and Fundraising & Event Chairpersons. It makes our job so much easier! The Executive Board is listed below and on Floral's website is a complete listing of all those involved.



### Co-Presidents

Cheryl Mendelson  
Paula Trabuco

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### Vice President

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### \*Secretary\*

To be filled

### Treasurer

Sophia Sweeney [sophiasweeney@townisp.com](mailto:sophiasweeney@townisp.com)

### Fundraising

Kimberly Andrews

[ktrep@townisp.com](mailto:ktrep@townisp.com)

Tracy Johanson has been our Secretary and unfortunately now has to step down. If anyone is interested in taking over this position, please feel free to contact any of the officers for information.

Now to reflect on the year so far. . . Although it seems sometime ago, a big thank-you to all of you who turned out for the pre-parade decorating after school and the Spirit of Shrewsbury Parade. In spite of the rain, our spirits were high and our voices loud as we all chanted an incredibly creative "Floral, Floral that's our School..." while carrying all our great signs. A special thank-you to Floral Street School's Art Teacher, Mr. Bob Wilson for his time and effort in helping us "get it together."

The month of October brought the Fund-raiser's Family Photo and the Gift-Wrap sale, as well as the wonderfully enjoyable "Family Literacy Night." A thank you to the families that came out for Family Photo and showed extreme patience as the rain forced us to reschedule and reschedule some of you again and again!! The Gift Wrap sale, the PTO's largest fund-raiser was a HUGE SUCCESS – your sales raised over \$18,000.00! A special thank you to Joanne Hubbard and all her helpers for making this fund-raiser possible and a thanks to all of you for working with your kids and selling/buying all the items - Thank you, thank you, thank you! Felicia Rutigliano, Lisa Sweet, Patricia Fay, Lisa George, Patty Lambert and everyone else involved with Literacy Night get our special thanks for creating and putting together an Event

that combined fun, creativity, learning and everyone's love of literature. It was a great family event and one we hope will become an annual tradition at Floral Street School. It was also a great example of how the partnership between parents and educators can create experiences for our children that are both fun and educational.

The month of November brings our next fundraising event...the Magical Evening of Giving. This is a great way to get some holiday shopping done on a Sunday evening without fighting the crowds.

There is more to come as 2004 rings in... Planning is underway by those who have volunteered to be PTO Representatives for the first ever, PTO sponsored Grade Level Nights. They will be asking for help from respective grade level parents – so any help you can provide to them will be greatly appreciated. March Madness, Breakfast with a Buddy, the Hoop

Shoot, the Falcon Fun Run/Walk, and the Second Annual Falcon Fair will fill up the year with fund-raisers and events that promise to provide some real family fun!

But wait...there's even more. Thanks and continued thanks to all of you who diligently cut out Box Tops and Campbell Soup Labels...your efforts will have brought in over \$700.00 from Box Tops this year to date and the labels from Campbell Soups gave our school enough points for the physical education Teachers to purchase some new equipment for our kids to enjoy during gym. All your efforts truly count!!

We wish all the families at Floral Street a wonderful Holiday Season and a Happy New Year. We look forward to the continuing success of the PTO in enriching the relationships within our school community and most importantly, enhancing the education of our children.

*Cheryl Mendelson and Paula Trabucco*

### ◆ Family Literacy Night ◆

Where were you on the evening of Tuesday, October 21<sup>st</sup>? If you were at Floral Street School then you know the power of literacy! The PTO sponsored literacy event provided opportunities for the Floral community to interact with a number of talented professionals including storytellers, a photo-journalist, staff readers, and a published illustrator. In addition, many students participated in a book swap, a raffle, and an assortment of hands-on activities, such as designing a bookmark.

Our featured guests were the talented performers of *Tribal Rhythms*. Through music and storytelling, the performers communicated an important message highlighting the value of cooperation and respect for differences. The interactive presentation culminated with the audience parading around the gym to the sounds of drums.

Mr. Ned Delaney, a published illustrator, joined us from Newburyport, Massachusetts. The audience watched with amazement as Ned illustrated a story generated by his audience.

Ms. Heather Dubois, a photo-journalist from the Community Advocate, demonstrated the intricacies of how she writes captions to explain the pictures she photographs.

Mr. Joe Sawyer, Mrs. Jane Lizotte, Mrs. Marie Cicuto (school secretary) and Mr. Mike Walsh (fourth grade teacher) read a variety of stories aloud. All four readers engaged the audience with their animated expression and passion for reading.

The book swap was a huge success! In weeks prior to Literacy Night, PTO members collected hundreds of books for children to enjoy from a preschool level through middle school. The books were sorted into three categories: picture books, informational books and chapter books. Most students left with approximately three “new” books apiece.

Our school-nurse, Mrs. Maureen Dodakian, featured nutritional foods as well as helpful information on “eating right”. The Shrewsbury Public Library table had applications available for obtaining a library-card, as well as a listing of upcoming events. Another informational booth provided resources for parents to help their children grow as readers.

This event was made possible through the financial support of the PTO as well as the following local organizations: Hebert’s Candies, Price Chopper, Shaw’s, Spag’s 19, Staples, Stop ’n Shop, and Target.

*Patty Lambert, Reading Specialist*

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#### ***FOURTH GRADE STUDENT COUNCIL. . .***

Did you know November is National Adoption Awareness Month? The Grade 4 Student Council met for the second time on Monday, November 3, 2003 to help the St. Mary’s Adoption Support Group “Touched by Adoption” project (which was organized by Floral Street parent Mrs. Donna White. We placed stickers in booklets called *An Educator’s Guide to Adoption*. The stickers listed names of people and companies that donated money to the project. All 636 Shrewsbury teachers will receive a copy of the booklet. These booklets give suggestions and educate teachers about adoption.

*Katerina Bogdesic Vujic*  
*Student Council Representative*

Last month the Grade 4 Student Council members went around the school to talk about UNICEF. UNICEF is an organization that collects money for poor countries. The collected money is used to buy food, clothing, and medicine for the people in need. We at Floral Street School have collected lots of money every year for UNICEF during the Trick or Treat for UNICEF campaign. Thanks to everyone who helped!

Avery Dutton  
Student Council Representative

#### ***FIFTH GRADE STUDENT COUNCIL. . .***

Hi!

We are Floral Street School fifth grade student council members. We are here to tell you about our student council. The student council members are: Kasey Sullivan and Taylor Herring (Mrs. Rivenburg); Pranay Bolheni and Jessica Parker (Mrs. Gouley); Stephanie Cooke and Efrain Montalvo (Ms. Aubin); Dustin Hardy and Sarah Jodrie (Mrs. Lavery); Jessica Mushinsky and Alex Granados (Ms. McCabe); Allison Grimaldo and Jeff Baum (Mrs. Gutekanst); Tyler Murphy and Trina Parks (Ms. McAteer); and Will Dell’Erba and Marina Bonorino (Mr. Yagodzinsky). In student council we do things that help the school or other people. One of the things we have done is collect money for UNICEF. We have raised a lot of money this year. To be in student council, you have to be willing to sacrifice, be loyal, and be a good role model. You also have to be able to share your ideas to make a great student council.

The student council has many responsibilities. One thing student council has to do is to help do some projects and fundraisers such as collecting for UNICEF, the Read – to – Feed program, and a food drive for Worcester County Food Bank. Another responsibility student council has is to get ideas for projects we can do such as having

fifth graders visit Floral Street School and tell the fourth graders about experiences at the middle school. There are many ways to get those ideas. One very good way is to ask your class if they have any ideas of things they would like to see happen in the middle school. That way, they feel involved with these projects as well. Another huge responsibility student council has is to do things like a bake sale to raise money for our projects. That way, the kids are happy, and we can donate the money we collected to other things around the school. The student council sure has a lot of responsibilities!

The first activity the student council did this year was collecting for UNICEF (United Nations

International Children's Emergency Fund). We first had a student council meeting about it. At the meeting we received the boxes and posters to share with our class. Two representatives talked about the drive at All Class Meeting. When the students collected the money, they turned it in to the student council representatives for their class. The representatives counted the money. We came to a total of \$791.68. We did a really good job with UNICEF, and I think we are going to have a fantastic year!

*Kasey Sullivan  
Pranay Bolheni  
Taylor Herring*

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## PRINCIPAL'S MESSAGE . . .

Dear Floral Street Families,



I am pleased to report that we have had a productive fall so far here at Floral Street School. All of our staff members are working hard each day to ensure that your children have the best opportunities for success. Recently, our professional development work has been focused on improving the alignment of our teaching practice to academic standards, so that we have a common understanding of what students should know and be able to do at key points during the school year. While student performance in relation to these standards will ultimately be communicated to parents and caretakers through **the new Elementary Report Card**, please be reminded that the report card you will receive on December 8 will consist of comments noting students' strengths and weaknesses in each of the four core subject areas and ratings in "habits of mind" (conduct, effort, etc.). The March report card will have comments, habits of mind, and performance levels related to the academic standards. This new system should be a great improvement over our former report card, as it will give you more specific information regarding your child's performance. If, after receiving the report card, you have questions about your child's progress, please contact his or her teacher.

The school/home partnership was strengthened further through the **parent conferences** that were held this fall, most of them on the October 22 conference day. The teachers were very pleased with this new approach to conferences, especially because they were able to meet with parents in their classrooms and in an atmosphere that was conducive to good communication (i.e. no disruptions since school was not in session). Many parents commented positively about being able to meet with specialist teachers in addition to the classroom teacher, which was not possible in past years. Teachers were also able to focus exclusively on their conference preparation, as they did not have to provide lesson plans for a substitute as

they did in the past. Providing detailed instructions for five-plus hours of teaching young children is a difficult task, and teachers would be inevitably thinking about how their classes were doing in their absence. Being able to meet with parents “in their offices” on a day devoted to this task was a big plus in teachers’ minds. Overall, our first conference day was a success, and we are using what we learned to try to improve it further for the March 24 day and for future years.



Because of a continuing trend, I would like to ask for your help in an area that has great impact on your children’s learning: their attendance. As you may know from reading the newspapers, both federal law (the *No Child Left Behind* legislation) and Massachusetts law (the *Education Reform Act*) put significant pressure on public schools to meet ambitious improvement targets for students’ academic performance. While our school has generally had good results on the MCAS test, we are working harder than ever to help all of our students to meet our core value of “maximizing learning.” However, the efforts of our teachers are diluted when students miss instructional time. **I am growing increasingly concerned with the number of school days students are missing because families are traveling during scheduled school time.** At the time I am writing this, student absences for family trips that we know of already total 283 lost days of learning.



Research demonstrates that one of the most important factors in students’ academic success is their “opportunity to learn.” In elementary school, students learn key foundational knowledge and skills through *their experiences*, which cannot be replicated through make-up work. When I visit classrooms as part of my supervisory duties, I am continually impressed with the skillful ways in which our teachers demonstrate, explain, and clarify new topics and skills. When students miss these lessons, they miss important learning opportunities. While our teachers work hard to help students who were absent to catch up, they cannot provide the same experiences that were missed (nor can they be expected to provide a set of work beforehand that would substitute for what will happen, especially as their planning is dynamic and adjusted each day according to the needs of the class). It should also be noted that time teachers spend helping students who were absent takes away from time that would otherwise be spent helping other students who may need support or enrichment. While we are committed to helping students who miss school, it is troubling that teachers are often spending their time in this way to assist students whose absences were not because of necessity but rather because of parental choice. (For more specifics on Shrewsbury’s policy on providing work for students who will be absent, please see the Elementary School Handbook that you received at the start of the year.)

We know that students will inevitably be absent on occasion for illness and unavoidable family commitments, and it is our job as a school to work with those students and their families to minimize the disadvantages those absences cause. We realize that some of our families, particularly those who have recently come from other countries, face challenges regarding staying in touch with faraway relatives and that these families do often choose to take their children on lengthy trips. We also know that some families will choose to take vacations during school time for reasons having to do with parent job schedules and cost. I feel that it is my duty as principal to communicate to you that all student absences come with an educational cost as well. It is not as simple as “making up the work,” as if teachers are just giving a set of assignments out each day. The richness of what happens in the classroom is lost when students miss class time, and it puts both the child and the teacher in an undesirable position. I ask that you please consider this when you make decisions that affect your children’s attendance. We at Floral Street School will continue to work hard at making sure that every one of the 180 days of



school are designed to maximize student learning, and I request that you honor those efforts by helping your child be present for as many of those days as possible. The very best lessons cannot help a student who isn't there.

*Respectfully,*

*Joe Sawyer*

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### **ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL'S MESSAGE. . .**

#### **Finding Solace in the Same Old Routines**

Dear Floral Street Families,

It is that time of year when we struggle to find time for things that matter the most to us. We find ourselves running in circles, trying to make sense of the busy calendar that hangs in the kitchen with every block filled. We wonder how we will make it through this hectic time of year. As parents, we often forget how our schedules, and those of our children, are affecting the home and school environments.



I recall saying aloud or to myself: “This will be good for us to do as a family;” “It is important that we attend both holiday performances to show our support;” “What’s an extra hour or two beyond the typical bedtime to finish watching this movie or completing this craft project?” I thought, “after all, we are doing these things for the children, for our family. Vacation is around the corner. We can rest and relax at that time.”

All too often one or more of us has spent vacation days at home; sick with colds, the flu, and other illnesses that happened to make their way into our tired bodies. During these times, my husband and I would be confused and feel frustrated by the fact that the time for which we had been waiting was being taken from us. We’d wonder how this could happen during vacation time when we were participating in healthy activities outside in the cold, fresh air, feeling relaxed and refreshed.

It was not until a couple of years ago that it occurred to me that the reason my children and my students were not attending to what I needed and wanted them to attend to was due to the frantic shopping trips; the late night holiday musicals; the additional time spent on decorating the house in an attempt to get in the holiday spirit; one too many sleepovers at friends’ houses; and week-end long celebrations feasting on sugared cookies and chips with dip.

This realization came to me at 10:00 p.m. one evening when I was putting our then 6 year-old son to bed, when he asked, “When can we do the stuff we used to do...the boring stuff?”

I looked at him and expressed my dismay: “What do you mean Joe? We are having so much fun doing all these special things.”

He replied, "I just want things back the way they were, where I come home from school, play outside, eat dinner, do my homework, read some stories, and go to bed."

After a fifteen-minute conversation with my first grader, while shutting off the lights for the final, **final** time, it hit me. My six year-old was searching for those same old routines; the familiar, nightly ritual of a home-cooked dinner, simple as it usually is, time spent on his first grade homework, cuddling on the couch with a favorite story, and experiencing that wonderful feeling of childhood, a time in our lives when everything and everyone is where you want them to be.

Our children constantly seek stability in their lives, whether that stability is in the form of a daily/nightly routine of homework, computer time, or a read-aloud before bed. As the adults in their lives, we need to make sure that we monitor the day to day schedules of our children and ensure that there is as much "down time" as scheduled time outside of the school day, particularly at this time of year. **Children seek and thrive upon familiar routines.** At school, while there may be some minor changes in routine between now and the end of the year, we will work to ensure that students' daily experiences are consistent and focused on learning. We ask that you help by trying to maintain consistency in your children's home lives as much as possible during this busy season.

As the Assistant Principal of Floral Street School and the mother of young school-aged children, I want to remind all of us (including myself) to continue to keep things in perspective and to ensure that the **most important** things in life, our children, do not suffer as a result of the hectic pace of the season.

Jane Lizotte

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### NOTE FROM THE NURSE . . .

#### Diabetes in Children

According to the American Diabetes Association, there are 17 million people in this country who have diabetes. Diabetes is a disorder that results in the body's inability to make or use insulin properly. Insulin is a hormone, made in the pancreas, which helps the body turn food into energy. There are two types of diabetes. Juvenile diabetes, now called type 1 diabetes, affects approximately 1 million people in the United States and usually begins during childhood. In type 1 diabetes, the body stops producing insulin. The cause of type 1 diabetes is unknown. Treatment consists of insulin injections and testing of blood sugar levels daily.

Type 2 diabetes usually occurs in the adult years and has been linked to obesity and a sedentary

life style. This type of diabetes is often treated with oral medication, diet and exercise.

Unfortunately, over the past several years, type 2 diabetes has been occurring in children. The most likely cause for this is the epidemic of childhood obesity that is occurring in this country. One quarter of children in the United States are considered to be overweight.

The signs of type 1 and type 2 diabetes are the same: excessive thirst and hunger, frequent urination, weight loss, weakness, and nausea and vomiting. The symptoms of type 1 diabetes usually present dramatically while the symptoms of type 2 diabetes can occur gradually over months or years. If left untreated, long term side effects of diabetes can occur affecting the heart, kidneys and eyes.

Reducing obesity and increasing activity in children can help lower the rates of type 2 diabetes. Eating and activity patterns develop at



an early age and parents need to help children make choices that will promote healthy habits. Eating healthy snacks and meals, including more fruit and fiber, and drinking less soft drinks, are positive steps in combating overweight tendencies in children. There has been a link to increased television viewing and obesity. Children eat more and are less active when spending time in front of the television and video game station. Increasing family activities, such as walking and bike riding, not only helps with developing healthy exercise habits, but improves

family time as well, which always seems too infrequent in today's busy world. Until a cure for diabetes is found, the best prevention and treatment is to follow a healthy and active lifestyle.

*Maureen Dodakian*

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## ***CURRICULUM NEWS . . .***

### **District Values Service to Others as Learning Experience**

Whether it's trick-or-treating for UNICEF, collecting canned goods, or gathering toys, Floral Street students know that the work they are doing is important to their community. That's exactly the message that Shrewsbury educators want to send as they help students coordinate these efforts throughout the school year.

As one of the core concepts of the district mission statement that advocates "partnership with the community", Floral Street contributes its share of time and energy into making children aware that they are part of a bigger community beyond their school, and even beyond their town. One of Floral Street's core values is "to understand and demonstrate respect for ourselves, for others and for our community." To do this, the entire school community of children and adults "practice compassion by helping those in need."

Last year Floral Street students engaged in a variety of outreach experiences. The Floral Street Student Council organized a school-wide collection for UNICEF during Halloween. That was followed by a food drive to benefit the

Worcester County Food Bank. In the spring, council members held a bake sale to raise money for the nature-trail project while profits from the school store were donated to the Great American Bake Sale to end hunger.

The PTO also sponsored a food drive in November that supplied local families with Thanksgiving dinners. In December, our second graders helped the Marine Corps with their annual "Toys for Tots" campaign. A fourth grade class collected "Pennies for Patients" to benefit the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. Other class and grade-level activities included pumpkin bread baking to benefit the Mustard Seed, gifts for a sickly child, charity jars for Abbey's House, valentines for the seniors at Southgate Nursing Home, and letters and care packages for U.S. troops.

According to Gerald (P.J.) O'Connell, Shrewsbury's Service Learning Coordinator, the district documents the activities taking place in schools to benefit the community and enrich student experiences. Documentation is also used to develop activities according to district goals, and to secure grants and account for funding from the Department of Education. In previous years, the DOE provided \$16,000 in funding for Service Learning. This year, with funding cutbacks, the district received \$10,000 toward service learning incentives. These funds assist in



the implementation of a district wide service learning program that provides opportunities for students to connect their work through the curriculum frameworks to real-world experiences. Students reflect upon the community service work they do through writing, literature connections, and class discussions. We want to ensure that our school is meeting its academic goals while fulfilling our mission of “cultivating compassion.”

*Carol Bradley, Curriculum Specialist*



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### ***UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD’S NEW REPORT CARD. . .***

One of our core values here at Floral Street School is for everyone to work together to celebrate the successes of both achievement and effort. On Monday, December 8<sup>th</sup> all Shrewsbury students in grades one through five will bring home a new report card. We designed the report card with the goal of providing information and feedback to parents about student achievement and effort. We want parents to understand what their children know and what they are able to do compared to the standards in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.

The first difference you will notice is that the new report cards do not have traditional letter grades. You will see that your child’s teacher has written individual comments about the student’s strengths and weaknesses in four content areas: English language arts, math, science, and social studies. These comments did *not* come from a computer-generated list. The teachers have looked at many samples of student work during this trimester and the comments are a summary of your child’s performance in each area.

Another new feature is a section called “Habits of Mind”. This gives teachers the opportunity to let you know how your child’s behavior and attitudes are affecting his or her learning. The teacher will describe your child’s ability to listen, be respectful, complete homework, and produce neat work that is easy to read. If your child meets these expectations most of the time you will see the word “Consistently” in this section. If the child tries to meet expectations but is not always successful you will see the word “Sometimes”. A student who is not meeting expectations will see the word “Rarely” printed beside the habit or skill.

It will take time for parents, teachers, and students to get used to these changes. We are trying to make a gradual transition. Last year, eleven of our teachers volunteered to be part of the introductory pilot scheme for the first version of this report card. Feedback from parents, students and teachers was very useful in helping us to improve on our first efforts. For this trimester, (August 27 – November 20) we have a report card with comments and Habits of Mind only. At the end of the next trimester in March you will receive a report card that will also include performance level descriptors for each of the standards. We

will continue to provide information to you regarding the new report card; you also may want to go to the "Parents' Place" section of our web site to view Frequently Asked Questions on this topic. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have further questions. Thank you!

Margaret Welch, Curriculum Specialist  
ext. 8742, [mwelch@shrewsbury.k12.ma.us](mailto:mwelch@shrewsbury.k12.ma.us)



### **SHREWSBURY CHILD DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE. . .**

#### **"PEOPLE IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD" TOUR FOR PRESCHOOLERS** **Group to visit Worcester County Food Bank December 9 & 10**

The Shrewsbury Child Development Committee (SCDC) is pleased to present the next tour in the "People in Your Neighborhood" program for preschool children and their families. In December, the tour will be of the Worcester County Food Bank where children can see first hand what goes on at this community facility. People can select the Tuesday, December 9 or Wednesday, December 10 tours. Each starts at 9:30 a.m. Cost is free, but participants are asked to bring a canned food item to donate to the Food Bank. For more information and to reserve your spot, please call SCDC at 841-8300 ext. 1477.



#### **WINTER WONDERLAND FESTIVAL** **Friday, December 12 from 9:30 - 11:30 a.m. at Chapel on the Hill**



The Shrewsbury Child Development Committee (SCDC) will host its annual Winter Wonderland Festival on Friday, December 12, from 9:30 - 11:30 a.m. at the Chapel on the Hill in Shrewsbury (Route 140, between Route 9 and Route 20). This fun filled festival, geared toward preschool age children and their caregivers, provides a variety of delightful games, seasonal crafts, delicious refreshments, live choral music and a photo opportunity (bring your camera!) sure to get everyone in the holiday spirit. The cost is \$2.50 per person with a \$10 maximum per family.

For more information about these programs, or becoming involved in the SCDC, please call (508) 841-8300 ext. 1477, email [SCDCKids@hotmail.com](mailto:SCDCKids@hotmail.com), or check out our website at [www.shrewsbury-ma.gov/schools/district/scdc/scdchome.htm](http://www.shrewsbury-ma.gov/schools/district/scdc/scdchome.htm).

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*If you would like to submit articles or announcements to be included in the next Floral Street School Falcon Focus, please eMail your Word document to [tbohush@aol.com](mailto:tbohush@aol.com).*